



Implementing Cardiovascular Disease Guidelines for Physicians and Patients to Improve Health Outcomes

Public Health Problem

Cardiovascular disease (CVD), mainly heart disease and stroke, is the leading cause of death in Arkansas. The state ranks fifth in the country in deaths from heart disease and second in deaths from stroke. The increased burden of disease in Arkansas compared with the rest of the United States may be partially explained by the higher rates of cardiovascular risk factors among state residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 1999 data indicate that more people in Arkansas than those in the general U.S. population have high blood pressure (28% vs. 24%), smoke cigarettes (25% vs. 22%), and are completely physically inactive (28% vs. 27%).

Evidence That Prevention Works

Compelling evidence from recent clinical trials supports the merits of aggressive risk reduction therapies for patients with CVD. The American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology urge all health care settings where CVD patients are treated to develop specific protocols and procedures reminding health care providers to implement the guidelines and assess the success of appropriate treatments.

Program Example

The Arkansas Wellness Coalition (AWC) is a nonprofit voluntary organization composed of partners interested in improving health outcomes for Arkansans. Member organizations include the American Heart Association (AHA), managed care organizations, the Arkansas Department of Health Diabetes Prevention and Control and Cardiovascular Disease Programs, the Arkansas Quality Improvement Organization, pharmaceutical companies, Arkansas Medicaid, and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. The Coalition's purpose is to improve the health and well-being of all Arkansans through the implementation of nationally recognized peer-reviewed guidelines for physicians and patient self-management. AWC works to coordinate efforts between health care providers and advocacy organizations to improve quality of care and health outcomes in targeted diseases, enhance consistency and efficiency of care by providing common core principles, and implement recognized standards of care. These efforts provide physicians throughout the state with the AHA guidelines and strategies for providing appropriate high blood pressure and high cholesterol treatment and follow-up care.

Implications

This program demonstrates the importance of disseminating and implementing recognized guidelines for the primary and secondary prevention of CVD by applying health systems. A guidelines-based approach can result in better outcomes for patients by applying recognized prevention and treatment standards, which help ensure improved quality of life and reduced risk for initial and recurrent heart attacks and strokes.

Contact Information

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